
THE CITY *of* TORONTO

ARCHIVES



Department of the City Clerk
Records and Archives Division

Cover: *The William James family and
neighbours*, c.1907, lantern slide.

Photographer: William James.

The William James Collection #91.41

INTRODUCTION

This booklet presents an overview of the mandate and programmes of the City of Toronto Archives. Published in conjunction with The Market Gallery exhibition, *For the Curious: The City Archives' Collections*, July 26 to October 12, 1986, it is intended to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the archival collections administered by the Department of the City Clerk. Hopefully, it will stimulate increased interest in the preservation of Toronto's unique civic heritage.

Although the municipal government has been creating and retaining records since the City's incorporation in 1834, it has operated without the benefit of any but the most primitive of control systems until relatively recently. The issue of a City Archives was first raised by City Council in 1887, but it was not until 1959 that a records unit was established as part of the Department of the City Clerk. The following year, a city archivist was officially appointed.

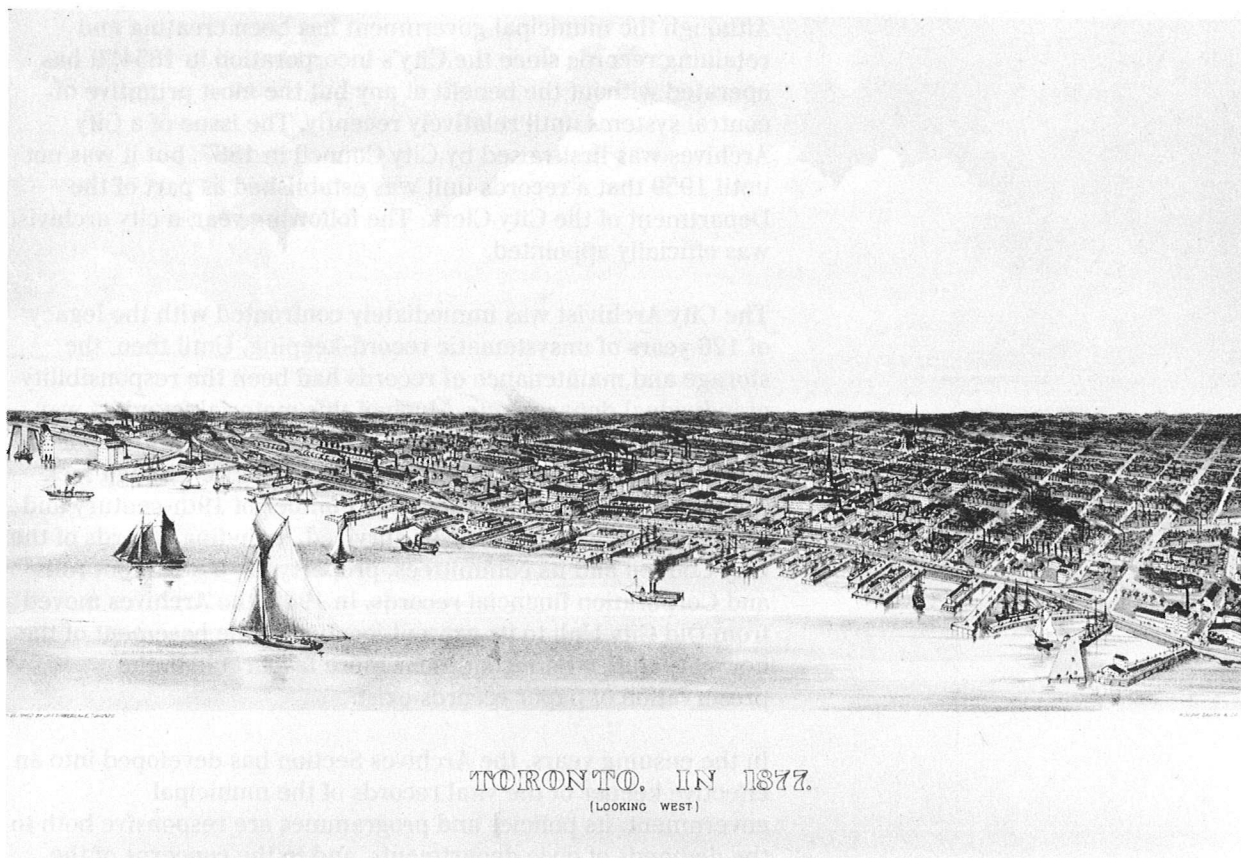
The City Archivist was immediately confronted with the legacy of 126 years of unsystematic record-keeping. Until then, the storage and maintenance of records had been the responsibility of individual departments. Much of this material found its way into the attic of Old City Hall, where security was minimal and environmental controls were non-existent. More through luck than planning, a surprisingly large number of 19th-century and early-20th-century documents survived, including records of the City Council and its committees, property tax assessment rolls and Corporation financial records. In 1965, the Archives moved from Old City Hall to its present location in the basement of the new City Hall, where conditions more favourable to the preservation of paper records exist.

In the ensuing years, the Archives Section has developed into an effective keeper of the vital records of the municipal government. Its policies and programmes are responsive both to the demands of civic departments, and to the concerns of the

public and researchers interested in many facets of the City's history. In recognition of its work, the Archives received the Distinguished Service Award of the Society of American Archivists in 1981.

The preservation of municipal records is required by the Ontario Municipal Act, which states that the City Clerk is responsible for keeping the books, records and accounts of the Council and for providing public access to such documents. In addition, the Municipal Act requires that all other records created by civic departments be evaluated to determine the amount of time they should be retained. This determination is based on a variety of factors, including the legal, financial, administrative and historical value of the record in question.

Toronto in 1877, James Timperlake, coloured print, 30.0 × 54.6, CRC 678





Portrait of Francis Henry Medcalf, 1868,
Mayor of Toronto 1864-66, 1874-75, detail of
oil on canvas, 78.7 × 66.5. Gift of D. M.
Medcalf, 1932

All dimensions for images are given in
centimetres; height preceding width.

Toronto's City Archivist, as Director of the Records and Archives Division, is responsible for assisting the City Clerk in carrying out his record-keeping duties. As set out by City Council at the time of its establishment in 1960, the Records and Archives Division is mandated "...to maintain intellectual and physical control of all records of the Corporation, from their point of creation through their final disposition, and to preserve materials of permanent administrative and historical value."

In 1973, City Council passed its first Records Retention By-law. This by-law, which is updated periodically to incorporate newly created record groups, officially defines the length of time records must be retained by the Corporation. It is from this list that the Archives identifies records of permanent value to be included in its Government Records Collection, which today contains more than 300 groups. The Records Retention By-law also establishes the limits of public access to municipal records. Generally speaking, all public records of City Council, its committees, property tax assessment rolls, voter's lists and election results are available without restriction. A large number of departmental records, those approved by the head of the department, have been made available through Archives. Some types of records that may contain sensitive information, such as personnel files or health reports about individuals, are made available by the Archives only after an appropriate period of time has transpired.

The Archives is more than a repository for municipal government records. As an organization committed to preserving the memory of the City, the Archives recognizes that the ultimate value of any document is determined by its usefulness as a research tool. Records are the raw materials from which we build an understanding of ourselves and gain an historical sense of our society. The role of the Archives as an institution of broader historical inquiry is acknowledged by the Municipal Act, which allows for the acquisition of items of historical value and interest from private donors and lenders. In order to enhance the research value of government records, the Archives actively acquires maps, documents, photographs, architectural plans, fine art and artifacts that pertain to the City's historical experience.

The Archives' collections embody a variety of materials originating from a wide range of sources. While many unique historical items are purchased, a large number are donated by generous citizens who feel that this heritage should be readily accessible to the people of Toronto. In addition to the knowledge that they have made a valuable contribution to the preservation of the City's history, donors may also benefit from tax-deductible receipts and several forms of special recognition from the City.

Once acquired, most materials are arranged according to the archival principle of "provenance." Items in the City's collections are organized in relation to the agency, institution, or individual from which they originate. Each record-creating agency of the municipal government is assigned a record group (RG) number. Each non-governmental source is assigned a special collection (SC) number. While maps, photographs and fine art may be catalogued according to media, individual items within these groups may retain an RG or SC number.

In order to bring the art and history of Toronto to the public, the City Archives operates a reading room and exhibition facility. The reading room, located in the basement of City Hall, is open to the public during regular business hours. A knowledgeable staff is available to assist researchers in using the collections. In addition to finding aids and other reference tools that enable researchers to retrieve materials easily, the reading room includes a variety of resources that complement the primary collections. These include: a library of books on Toronto history, urban studies, art and architecture, and genealogy; a collection of Toronto City Directories covering the period from 1834 to 1980; information files on a broad range of subjects including a large number related to architecture and heritage buildings; street name change indexes; biographical files for elected officials; 19th-century newspapers; Toronto and District Labour Council minutes; and a collection of papers and theses on subjects related to Toronto's history.

In a typical year, the reading room accommodates as many as 3,000 visitors. The most frequently researched topics are those relating to facets of Toronto's social and political history. Such enquiries account for approximately 30 percent of the total. Other research interests are architectural and building history, neighbourhood studies, genealogy, photographic documentation, and urban geography. Forty percent of all reading room users

Illuminated resolution presented to Mayor E.F. Clarke, 1889, watercolour and ink on paper, 60.2 x 44.3, Rolph-Smith & Co., R85-43



Archives' conservators clean the surface of glass-plate negatives to prevent deterioration and scratching of the delicate photo emulsion.



Contemporary images by Peter Goodwin, Department of the City Clerk, Records and Archives Division.

The Council Chamber of Toronto's Front Street City Hall (1845-1899) now serves as The Market Gallery's main exhibition space. The fan windows, which once overlooked Lake Ontario, now provide a view of the main floor of the busy South St. Lawrence Market.

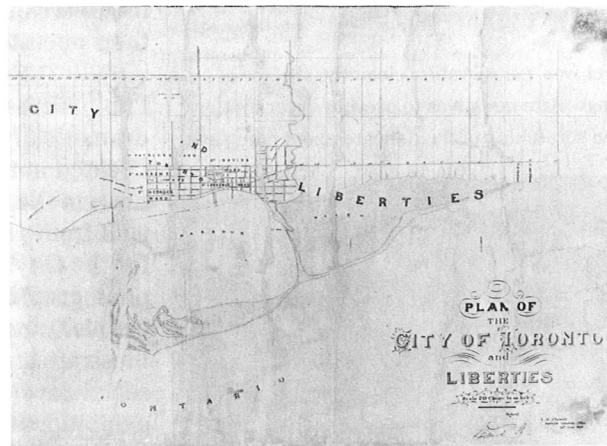
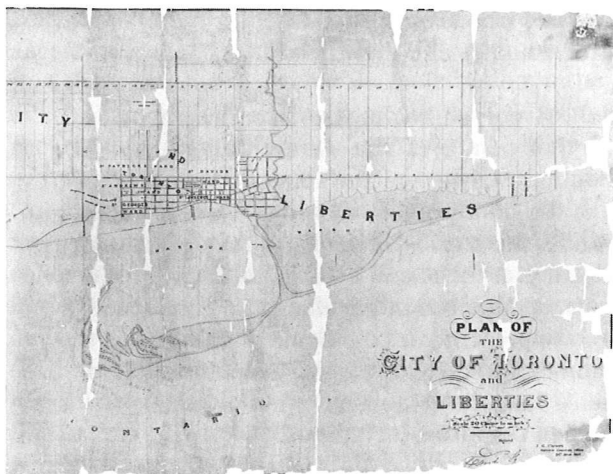
are faculty and students from universities and colleges. Others come from secondary schools, community groups, law firms, business organizations and the media. Many, however, are members of the public who are eager to discover more about their ancestors, their homes and their neighbourhoods.

Public access to the Archives' holdings and services improved dramatically with the opening of The Market Gallery in 1979. Located in the South St. Lawrence Market at 95 Front Street East, in the part of the building that served as Toronto's City Hall from 1845-1899, this exhibition facility provides a showcase for the City's extensive archival and artistic holdings. Fine art, photographs, maps, documents and artifacts are enhanced by extensive research to present various thematic exhibitions that illustrate and comment on the City's historical, cultural and social development. Since its establishment, more than 40 exhibitions have been mounted, including:

The History of Firefighting in Toronto; Meeting Places: Toronto's City Halls; Discovering High Park; Toronto to Scale: Maps from 1792-1975; From the Shadows: Paintings from the Thirties and Forties; and The Thirties: A Photo Legacy from the Globe and Mail Collection.

The Market Gallery's extension programme provides travelling exhibitions to schools, libraries and other public institutions, and to galleries, without charge. A variety of free-standing displays cover topics such as Toronto's architectural history, the history of engineering in the City and a celebration of Toronto firsts.





To ensure the longevity of its collections, the Archives maintains a conservation programme. Although the preservation of archival material is the responsibility of all staff members, there are two full-time conservators responsible for the planning and implementation of procedures for restorative treatment, environmental control, storage, care and handling procedures and security.

The Archives operates conservation facilities at both City Hall and The Market Gallery. The City Hall laboratory is equipped to perform a variety of chemical and mechanical treatments on documents, maps, books, photographs and works of art on paper. Items referred to the lab are thoroughly examined to determine the nature and extent of degradation. Appropriate treatments to arrest deterioration and improve the overall condition are then undertaken.

At The Market Gallery, the conservators prepare material for exhibition, including matting, framing and encapsulation. The conservators also assist in the installation of all exhibitions and advise Gallery curators on conservation display methods. Conservation staff also provide orientation sessions and advice on the handling and care of documents to City staff and to the general public. On occasion, the conservators present workshops on conservation techniques.

Plan of the City of Toronto and Liberties,
J.G. Chewett, 1834,
coloured manuscript, CRC 83D

Left, a hand-drawn plan in ink on paper, after washing and deacidification, still has many tears and holes to be repaired.

Right, the same plan reinforced with a paper backing, and after tears and holes are filled with paper of a similar colour and texture.

GOVERNMENT RECORDS

The most important records in any municipality are those that document the actions of the major decision-making body, the City Council. This record group (RG 1) includes minutes, papers, correspondence and by-laws relating to all official City activities since its incorporation. The research value of this collection is enhanced by the existence of bound volumes of Council minutes (printed since 1859). They are indexed and include the full text of all committee and departmental reports presented to Council for its consideration. Since the mid-1970s, the Records and Archives Division has been responsible for producing audio recordings of all Council meetings. Since 1984, meetings of the Council have also been recorded on videotape. These tapes, which are available for screening in the Archives' reading room, allow researchers to examine the verbatim record of Council debate and to observe the performance of elected representatives.

Council records are supplemented by extensive holdings from standing and special committees, boards, commissions and civic departments. The documents they contain can be used to trace the progression of all City policies and activities. Although Council minutes include committee reports, the minutes of each committee provide a wealth of background material not available from any other source. Of greatest value to researchers are the records of the Executive Committee (formerly the Board of Control from 1896-1969). Each minute book from 1896 on is alphabetically indexed to provide access to subjects.

The records of standing committees of Council are available in varying degrees. The minutes of the Committee on Works (RG 6) and the Committee on Parks and Recreation (RG 17), for example, survive from the 1850s. Corresponding papers and minutes of other standing committees, however, exist only from after 1920.



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